

The Church that gets its house in order

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[0 : 0 0] 1 Timothy, I'm reading chapter 2, verses 1 through to 7.! On the Pew Bibles, you can find that on page 1191.

! 1 Timothy, chapter 2. I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.

For kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose, I was appointed a herald and an apostle. I'm telling the truth, I'm not lying.

[1 : 1 2] And a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks, Tim.

Good morning, St. Silas. Great to see you. If we've not met before, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here. I'll be taking us through that reading we just had. So if your Bible is at hand, please do turn to 1 Timothy chapter 2.

If it's fallen close, it's page 1191. And we're going to look at what God is saying to us by his spirit through this passage. You can find an outline in the notice sheet to follow along as we go.

And we're going to ask for God's help. So let's bow our heads and I'll lead us in a prayer. We praise you, mighty God, for that revelation in 1 Timothy chapter 1 of who you are.

That you are the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God. The one to whom all glory and honor should rightly go forever.

[2 : 2 1] And we thank you that thanks to your grace to us and your patience with us, we can approach you as our Father in Christ. And so we do that now.

We approach you without fear. And we ask that you'll open your word to our hearts. And you'll open our hearts to your word. For we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Well, we've started this series in 1 Timothy, asking how does a church that's lost its way get back on track? The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who he put in charge of a church that he planted in Ephesus.

Paul spent three years himself in Ephesus. So best start a church could ever have. And then he moved on. And within a few years, this church was being steered off course.

And Timothy was charged, we saw this last week, he was charged to take the helm and steer the church back into the deep waters of the gospel.

[3 : 2 8] And the problem that he was having to deal with. And the problem that he was having to deal with was a group of teachers in the church who had covered up and obscured the gospel message. Now that is hard to spot at times, because I'm sure that these teachers would have still affirmed a lot of true things about God, about what's revealed about God in the Bible, enthusiastically.

And yet the focus of their teaching had been skewed. It was moralistic. They were preoccupied with rules and restrictions. It was all about what we should do for God, instead of what God has done for us.

And so the saving news of Jesus had fallen into the background. It would be a bit like if you went to an art gallery. We were on holiday in Amsterdam a few weeks ago.

And one of the art galleries there, the Van Gogh Art Gallery, you know, our kids wanted to go because they'd seen one or two of the paintings at school. And so there's sort of one or two particular paintings.

But imagine that there was an art gallery where there was one masterpiece that everyone went for. And you went and you queued up and you went in and you were going around the gallery and you got to the room where it was meant to be and it wasn't there.

[4 : 43] And you say to the steward, where's the painting? And they say, oh yeah, we've still got it, but we've moved on now. We've put it into storage. It's in a storeroom, tucked away.

It's hidden from view. That's the kind of thing going on here in the church as it's gone off course. And Paul's aim, as we started looking at last week, and it's an urgent one, it's set out in chapter three.

If you just turn over the page, chapter three, you can see the urgency of verse 14. It's as though you can picture him on his way. He says, although I hope to come to you soon, I'm writing to you with these instructions so that if I'm delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

The church is meant to be like Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, the way that that huge pillar holds up the statue of Nelson so that you can see him far and wide.

We've got a similar example in George Square, the Sir Walter Scott statue, where there's this big pillar so that wherever you are, you can see him. And the church is meant to be like that, to hold aloft to a watching world the saving news of the gospel, the news about Jesus.

[6 : 05] So in chapter one, Paul wrote to Timothy about protecting the gospel by commanding these teachers to stop, and then about delighting in the gospel as Paul gave us the antidote to getting too focused on what we do for God is that he delights in what God has done for him, that he was a terrible sinner, the worst of sinners, and God showed his great patience as his grace flowed out and covered Paul in mercy.

So do we want St. Silas to be a church that is sailing the right course? Is that what you want for your church? Well, the first key step, our first point this morning, is the church is called to pray for all people.

So have a look with me again at verse one. Paul says, I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people.

So it's all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people. Paul lines up those four terms for prayer. They're overlapping terms. Prayers, intercession, thanksgiving, petitions.

So I take it it's all kinds of prayers. Prayers that are short, prayers that are long, prayers that are pre-written, prayers that we write ourselves, prayers that we make spontaneously when we hear news, prayers that are planned and disciplined.

[7 : 36] All kinds of prayers for all kinds of people. And I don't know about you, but maybe we find it a bit startling that this is the first thing that Paul commands the church to do here.

You notice that language in verse one? I urge then, first of all. Now this is the, Paul has used the language of warfare in chapter one, verse 18. He said to Timothy that he has to fight the good fight well.

In chapter six, he takes up that language again. In verse 12, he says to Timothy, fight the good fight of the faith. And then we get this first step.

I urge then, first of all, and maybe we wouldn't expect that the next thing he'd say is pray. Maybe we'd expect something more active that we'd be called for.

When I spend time at conferences or in ongoing development, thinking about how to develop as a church leader, as a Christian minister, often the focus is on other good things that are called on to be a minister and we call our church to do.

[8 : 47] More active things that we need to get on with, strategies. And as we think about church planting this year, a lot of the talk about the church plant that we long to plant in the East End under Tim and Lauren's leadership with the launch team we send out, a lot of the conversation is about strategy.

What are we going to do in the East End? And for St. Silas, those of us who will stay, there'll be lots of talk about what are we going to do as we rebuild having sent out that launch team.

The Bible urges us here, first then, pray. Pray outward focused prayers. And I don't know about you, but I find that a great relief to me.

This is good, isn't it? That the way forward as a church is to depend on God, to turn to Him and ask Him to be at work. So what does that prayer look like well all through this chapter, the main focus is on our church meetings.

We'll see that next time we're in chapter two as well. It's about when we come together to meet. But with these instructions about prayer, I take it they overflow from that as well to other times that we pray that this can inform our individual prayer lives.

[10 : 03] And when we come together for our monthly church prayer meeting, we had that last Wednesday, so encouraging. The numbers gathering now. We had a guy, Robin, who was at St. Silas before.

He's now planting a church in Winchborough, and we've been supporting him for a few years. So he hadn't been to our church prayer meeting for a few years. And he was thrilled by how many people are coming to our central prayer meeting.

We meet with Christians in other smaller groups. Maybe you meet with a Christian friend regularly, or you meet with a roots group, or a growth group. How do we pray? Well, our key prayer here in chapter two, verse one, is for all kinds of people, and it would be missional.

It's that all kinds of people become Christians themselves. We can see that from how the passage goes on, as we'll hear shortly, in what Paul says next. And Paul says here, did you notice, prayer for all people, and then he gets more specific in verse two, for those in authority.

Pray for kings and all those in authority. And then he tells us why. So that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

[11 : 19] So Paul is saying there, pray for the emperor at the time, the emperor of the Roman Empire. Pray for governors. Pray for the prime minister.

Pray for the government. Pray for the first minister, the Scottish government. Pray for presidents and dictators around the world. We're not to think, oh, well, they're beyond the reach of the gospel.

They're too lofty for this, for the Christian faith. Or they're too set in what they believe. We're to remember, no, God is the one with all authority and all power.

Even the great presidents and kings of our world are under him. And he calls them to him. Chapter one, verse 17. He is the king. He is the eternal king, immortal.

He is the only God. And so we pray for everyone under him and everyone under them. And the logic of verse two is that if a king or someone in authority becomes a Christian themselves, there's every chance that it gets easier for Christians living in that place to live out their Christian lives obediently.

[12 : 32] In verse two, that goal, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives. Now that doesn't mean that we'll just get out of everyone's way and be unnoticed, that idea of living a quiet life.

Rather, it's that we could avoid unnecessary conflict and hassle. That what we want for Christians, for the church, is that everywhere there would be churches and the Christians in those churches would be able to live freely for Jesus, living lives to please God, avoiding unnecessary persecution.

And in verse two, the two words Paul uses at the end there for that kind of life that we're to live, we have them there as godliness and holiness.

Now the first word there, godliness, is a word for being a mature Christian, being more like Jesus, that we would, God would, a God-enabled life that pleases Him, all that God calls us to be.

And then the next word there, the holiness word, is a word that is more outward facing. It's a word that describes, we might have it translated as something like dignified, lives of dignity, lives that the world would look on and notice and acknowledge that that's a good way to live, that's a way of life that makes sense.

[13 : 58] And so often we see that, don't we, in life, that when you speak to someone who became a Christian as an adult and you ask them their story, so often I find in that story they will say, well, I had a friend who was a Christian or a colleague who was a Christian and there was something about them.

There was something about them. And that's what we long for, that there be opportunities for that. So these are key verses that inform how we are to pray when we come together and our team of people who lead our prayers on Sundays, they model this for us week by week.

We pray for internal things, church things, we pray for people who are in difficulty in our church family, people in challenging situations, and that is appropriate, but our prayers go beyond that to pray for our world, praying to a big God, big prayers for our world because it's His world and we pray for all kinds of people outside of the church.

And when there is conflict and unrest in the world, we pray for peace, that is appropriate, and we also pray for God's gospel plan for the nations.

Christians. So we pray for Christians in all parts of the world, including parts of the world that are very troubled, that they would hold on to the gospel and they'd hold out the gospel.

[15 : 23] And we pray for leaders and kings and governments to repent and believe in Jesus, that they would live their lives in fear of God and govern in that kind of way because that's what we're commanded to do here.

And we can take that model with us as individuals. Maybe sometimes we feel that our prayer lives are a bit stuck in a rut. We pray for the same old things in the same old ways.

And we're not to be embarrassed to be praying for the same old things. Those are probably things that are deeply important to us. And Jesus urges us to pray daily for our needs. But we can also use these verses as a model for ourselves to expand out the things we pray for.

And if you're in a small group, a roots group, a growth group, maybe a Christian union at university or a Christian fellowship in the workplace, could you be the model in that group of praying these kind of outwardly focused prayers?

You know, when it goes round and people say, what would you like prayer for? Or that at times you would say, well, let's pray for mission. Let's pray for God's gospel plan for the nations.

[16 : 32] I think of a young man in our church who I know, I wasn't there, but recently encouraged a couple of people saying to them that one of his prayers every morning is that God would give him a chance that day.

God, would you give me a chance today to speak about Jesus to someone who doesn't yet know him? Would you open that door for me? And we might add to that, and God, please will you make it obvious, that opportunity, so I don't miss it.

I think of a friend who set up in his church a men's fortnightly evangelistic prayer meeting. So he started gathering men to pray fortnightly in the morning, early, before work, and the agenda was mission.

We're going to pray for mission. We're going to pray for mission partners. We're going to pray for our own evangelism. We're going to come together. We're going to pray for each other's friends who don't know Jesus. We're going to share one another's efforts to make Jesus known.

We're going to pray for each other in that. Other times, we'll pray for other things, but when we gather for that breakfast, fortnightly, mission is on the agenda. So let's be spurred on by verse one here to fight the good fight by asking people to pray big prayers to our big God for the people around us who don't know Christ from the most powerful people in the world and the people who are in power over us to the most overlooked.

[17 : 59] I've spent time on that because really that is our application this morning. But in the rest of the passage, Paul gives us the reasons why. The reasons why it makes sense to pray like that.

So our second point, God's desire is to save all people. Look with me again from verse three. This is good and pleases God our Savior who desires, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

We can see this big idea running right through the verses of all people. You notice that in verse one, all people. In verse four, all people. Then in verse six, all people.

And verse four here is key to understanding the whole letter. Paul introduced his whole letter. It's always interesting to think, what does Paul say about God at the start of his letter?

Chapter one, verse one, God our Savior. We are not to think of God the Father as a distant judge looking down with displeasure at all the mess we've made of our lives.

[19 : 15] And thank goodness for Jesus that he's got in the way, he had compassion on us, he's placated his Father's anger and he's dealt with it so that we're forgiven.

Rather, God is a Savior, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Together, their will is to save. Their heart's desire is that all kinds of people will be saved.

So that even though 1 Timothy is a letter full of instruction for his church to get his house in order, it's all with the aim that others will be saved.

And I think this is a big surprise of the letter of 1 Timothy. That we might think, if I really want people around me, you know, people I play football with or people I work with to be saved, what's that got to do with the doctrine of my church that I belong to?

What's it got to do with my holiness? That's in-house stuff. Isn't what matters just my ability to get on with my mates and evangelism training? But 1 Timothy teaches us that God will save all kinds of people through his church when we get our doctrine right, what we believe, chapter 1.

[20 : 32] and when we pray outwardly focused prayers, verse 1, and when we live godly and holy lives, verse 2. When we live differently for God and we prayerfully pray he will act, we attract people to God.

If God wants people to be saved, this is what we should do. Now it's worth thinking, isn't it, at this point, why doesn't God just save the people? If God wants to save them, why do we need to pray that that would happen?

It's worth saying that's always true of prayer, isn't it? That actually, we just need to accept there is mystery there that the way God has ordained things in his world is that though he has good things that he wills to do, he's ordained it that he will move his people to pray for those things and then he will act to answer their prayers.

That's how God does things. But prayer like this is important not just because of the way God has ordained it, that it can change situations, but also because God, as God, he is our, as we pray to God, it changes us.

So I'm not saying it doesn't change situations, I think it does. I had an amazing, I think I've shared this before, but I, when we first moved to Glasgow, I knew someone, I'd met someone from Glasgow, years before, and I had no way of contacting him, and one day I prayed in my office to God that I said, I've got no way of contacting this guy, and I know he's in Glasgow, and now I'm in Glasgow, I don't really know anyone else in Glasgow, could I bump into him?

[22 : 16] And I went out to Tesco to get a meal deal, and he was in the street, it was incredible, so I shouldn't be surprised, but it was amazing. So I do believe when we pray, it changes situations, but it also, it changes us, because it turns our gaze outwards when we pray missional prayers.

Moralistic teaching in a church, it makes a church inward looking, because it, we start to become judgmental of one another and of the outside world, and when we start praying missional prayers, it turns our gaze away from our own navels, and outward to a world that's perishing, because people are enslaved by sin and death, and God wants to save all kinds of people around us like that, people who go to your gym, people at the football, people who live in high-rise flats, people who live in villas, people who live in palaces, people who are homeless, God wants to save them, people who are transgender, people who are misogynistic, people who vote for the Alba party, people who vote reform, people in the SNP government, BMW drivers, God wants to save all sorts of people.

It's not a difficult message this morning. When we pray for them, it pleases God, because he wants to save all sorts of people. Really, that's it.

We don't know which ones God will ultimately save, and there's mystery here, because in the next letter, Paul writes to Timothy, he says, what is clear elsewhere in the Bible as well, that it is within God's sovereign power to grant repentance to whomever he wants.

But we have to hold that together with the assurance here that in a profound, true sense, God desires people to turn back to him. He holds out that offer, and he wants you to respond.

[24 : 21] It's true if you're here this morning and you're still looking in, you know, you're looking in at the Christian faith, you maybe feel like you're looking over the hedge at what the Christian life is like. If you're asking yourself, well, what does God want me to do?

The answer is, well, in a sense, he doesn't want you to do anything, but he wants to save you. He wants you to trust Jesus, to turn back to him through Jesus.

That's what he wants. He wants you to trust Jesus. He says there's rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. And we don't know which people he will save, but that means we can pray for everyone, trusting that God's desire is, turn to me and be saved.

That's our second point. We pray because it pleases our saving God. And the next reason we pray for all people is that whoever they are, there is only one way for them to be saved.

That's our third point. Jesus is the only ransom for all people. Look with me again at verse five. For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

[25 : 44] This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. So first here we see God's universality. There is one God, only one.

He's really there. In our culture, in a Western culture, people think skeptically about God and we might find ourselves asking, is God really there? there, but the Bible reveals to us he is there.

And Paul and the apostles knew that because they'd met Jesus, once dead, now alive again, never to die again, come to reveal God to us.

So that Paul can tell us with great certainty there is a God. He's the only God, the God of the Bible. And that means wherever we live in the world, whatever our parents believed about God, however we were brought up, whatever we think, the living creator God of the Bible, he relates to each one of us in the same way.

He made us and we are accountable to him. It means the most important point to settle for every single person in the world is, are you right with God?

[26 : 56] Because he made you. And left to themselves for every single person in the world, the answer to that question is, no, I am not right with God. Whatever religion they might follow, whatever they might have chosen or had chosen for them, however good they might try and be, whatever standard they're using to be a good person, they are not right with God on their own.

They are a lost cause. And then we hear about the only solution for every person, verse 5, there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind.

The word mediator here, it's a word we usually use in a legal claim, a law dispute, where you have two parties that have fallen out so badly, they can't negotiate with each other anymore.

And sometimes you get them and you put them in separate rooms and the mediator goes between the rooms and whenever they're in one room, they're representing the other party. And then they go in the other room and they represent that party and they try and build the bridge to draw them back together.

Just as world leaders are trying to mediate at the moment urgently in that dispute between India and Pakistan. Well, such was our relationship with God. It was broken because in our hearts we had settled ourselves against him.

[28 : 18] But there is one mediator, only one, one man who could step into the gap between us and God. and make peace. Only he could do this because he is both God and man.

So he could come to us from God to turn our hearts back to God as he revealed God's glory. And he can, he's the man Christ Jesus, a righteous man so that he can approach God on our behalf.

He can bridge the gap between us and God so that we can come home. God then we get the language of ransom in verse six.

He gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. I take it that the language there of this has been witnessed, the thing that's been witnessed at the proper time is that the ransom is for all people.

Whoever you are, anyone, you can respond to this ransom. ransom. And this word ransom is the language of the slave market where people were owned in slavery, in captivity.

[29 : 32] And you can pay someone's ransom price and it will deliver the captive. It will set them free. And Jesus saw that we were enslaved. We were in slavery to sin and to death.

We can't stop sinning and we can't stop dying. And moved by love for us, he resolved to do what only he could do. No one else could do it.

And it was very costly. Verse 6, you notice that? It says, he gave himself. It was so costly that he prayed in Gethsemane, asking God if there's any other way.

If there's any other way, can we do it that way? But there was no other way. So he allowed Judas to betray him, the chief priest to falsely accuse him, Pilate to bring him out in front of the angry mob and say, behold the man, and they shouted, crucify him.

And they led him away, and he died the death we deserve to die, forsaken by God, because only he could do it. Die the death that we deserve to die, and pay the ransom price, so that we could be saved by God, to belong to God, which is true freedom.

[30 : 48] So it's the most exclusive message, because there is no other way. The Bible's so clear about that. There's one mediator, there's one ransom.

But it's the most inclusive news, isn't it? Because it's for anyone at all, of any rank, from any nation, however powerful, however lowly.

And so that's why we must pray. And it's why all people need to hear the message, and that's our fourth point. The message of Christ must be delivered to all people. Let's look at verse 7.

And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle. I'm telling the truth, I'm not lying, and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles. So there are some messages that get kept under wraps.

The messages that will have gone on in the conclave last week in the Vatican, before the white smoke, we will not hear those messages. And sometimes you get messages that get leaked out, but people try and contain them.

[31 : 51] So you get celebrities going to court to get super injunctions because details of their private life have been disclosed and they don't want it. But this is news, says Paul, that needs to be proclaimed.

It needs to be shared with everybody, heralded. And that phrase Gentiles there, that's the nations, it's the world. And that mission is now the mission of the church.

This is the big thing that God is doing today in our times. Through his church, he's saving all sorts of people as we hold on to the gospel and we hold out the gospel.

And isn't it wonderful to know that God is like this? That he is a savior. That his desire is that we all people will be saved. So that to be godly, to be a godly person, is to have a compassion for people outside the church and to be mission-minded for them because God wants to save them.

So we pray that they would come to know Jesus and we are intentional, we're deliberate about making Jesus known. Last year I got to know Joel and Myra.

[33 : 03] They're a couple who have a teenage son at high school and they've moved from Central America to Spain to make Jesus known there in Spain as missionaries.

Now if you and I went with them, imagine we moved to Spain to be part of Joel and Myra's mission team in Spain, I take it that starting afresh like that, we'd be very thoughtful, wouldn't we?

We'd be very deliberate about things like, what clubs am I going to join and societies? Where am I going to drink my coffee? How am I going to spend my time?

Where are the opportunities to get to know people in this community and engage with them and serve them with the intention that I'll get opportunities to make Jesus known?

Of course Tim and Lauren are doing that just now in Glasgow, in the East End, since they moved there three months ago. They're deliberate and thoughtful because they've gone there with church planting in view.

[34 : 05] And if you're a missionary overseas and you've got to know a group of people in the place where you are and you've kind of made known something of Jesus and that you follow Jesus and you find that they are not in any way interested, that it's not making any progress, I take it that there would come a point when you'd think, is there a different way I should be spending my time?

Do I need to sort of, I don't want to be rude to those people or stop being their friend, but do I need to kind of shift my focus to a different group of people to try something else, to be more effective?

Well the truths about God here in 1 Timothy 2 call all of us to think in that mission-minded kind of way. It's the normal Christian life to be intentional like that.

If God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, how does that affect my prayer life and flowing over from that all the decisions I make so that I can try and serve people around me towards that goal.

Why? Brilliantly because of the desire of God. He wants everyone to be saved. And wonderfully because of the work of Christ that he is the mediator and he's paid the ransom so that we can offer out that hope of life.

[35 : 30] So let's pray together. We're going to have a moment of quiet now, just a chance to reflect on God's word. Then I'll lead us in a prayer. And then we'll sing.

Amen. Amen. Amen. We praise you, Father God, for your holiness, that you are a great king and that you are a savior, God our savior.

We praise you for your saving plan for the nations and that you indiscriminately save all kinds of people. We thank you for Jesus who has given himself as a ransom for all.

And we ask that you'll be at work by your spirit, stirring us up, that we will be a church delighted to sail in the deep waters of the gospel, praying, heralding that news, pursuing holiness and godliness.

And would you give Jesus the nations as his inheritance? And in your kindness, we dare to ask, Heavenly Father, as you do that, would you include people we know this morning who are very dear to us?

[37 : 05] We ask for Jesus' name's sake. Amen.